



Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

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AGENDA DATE: July 1, 2009

TO: Front Country Trails Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force

FROM: Front Country Trails Task Force Staff

SUBJECT: **Front Country Trails Recommendations Status Report**

RECOMMENDATION: That the Front Country Trails (FCT) Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force receives a status report on implementation of the FCT Management Recommendations.

DISCUSSION:

The purpose of this staff report is to provide the FCT Task Force with a progress report on implementation of the FCT Management Recommendations and to outline proposed activities for the next six to 12 months. The following discussion provides a status report on each recommendation. The attached updated matrix illustrates a proposed schedule.

Administration/Organization

1. Develop an interagency (City/County/Forest Service) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for trail management, maintenance, and funding.

City, County, and Forest Service staff developed the interagency agreement using the federal government's Challenge Cost Share Agreement (CCA). Similar in concept to an MOU, the CCA is the mechanism by which the Forest Service enters into cooperative agreements with other governmental agencies and private organizations. The CCA establishes the terms of the partnership and provides the framework for agencies to share costs and resources as well as transfer funds between agencies. The CCA will be in place until September 30, 2013, and any funding associated with the agreement will be approved on an annual basis.

The CCA establishes the intent and expectations of the partnership, respective agencies roles and responsibilities, and the planning and decision-making framework. The CCA outlines shared commitments of all three agencies, such as:

- Develop cooperative procedures and practices that establish trail use standards for general public use and for those uses that require permits.

- Produce and approve a FCT management strategy and funding plan for trails planning, management, and project priorities, and establish an annual operating and capital project budget.
- Work cooperatively to prepare an annual work plan that identifies common projects resulting in interagency cost efficiencies.
- Develop, to the extent practicable, operating procedures and standards to ensure joint accomplishments of FCT management activities.
- Designate a staff liaison for purposes of discussing and resolving coordination matters.
- Establish mechanisms to allow the transfer of funds between agencies for specific purposes.
- Establish an inter-agency coordinator for implementation of the FCT Strategy and funding plan, grant writing, education and outreach, and coordination with trail user groups and volunteers.

Status: The Santa Barbara City Council authorized the CCA on April 28th and the Board of Supervisors authorized the CCA on June 23rd. Once signed by the City, County, and Forest Supervisor, the CCA will go into effect immediately.

Next Steps: The CCA provides the framework for the three agencies to jointly fund projects that benefit the FCT system. To better define these costs and institutionalize the partnership, City, County, and Forest Service staff will be developing a work plan that outlines short-term and long-term resource needs. For the first year, each agency has set aside \$10,000 to be used to fund the FCT Coordinator position. It is anticipated that the three agencies will also seek grant opportunities for specific projects and work closely with the trails community.

2. Develop a multi-agency FCT Strategy.

The purpose of the FCT Strategy is to provide the framework for communicating a long-term vision, goals and objectives, and trails planning, management, and project priorities. A strategy focused on the front country trails would serve as a work plan for interagency collaboration and the vehicle for the implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

Status: The Task Force reviewed a draft outline at its meeting in June 2008.

Next Steps: Staff is proposing that development of the strategy occur over the next 12 months. The FCT Coordinator will be important for moving this effort forward.

3. Develop a funding plan to address trails planning and maintenance, capital projects, enforcement, and education and outreach.

The purpose of the funding plan is to establish an annual operating and capital project budget, identify project priorities, specify project implementation and maintenance costs, and demonstrate organizational capacity to potential funding agencies. The funding

plan will also identify potential funding sources as well as opportunities to seek support from volunteers and trail user organizations.

Status: No work has begun on this recommendation.

Next Steps: Staff is proposing that development of the funding plan occur over the next 12 months. The FCT Coordinator will be important for moving this effort forward.

4. Establish an inter-agency FCT Coordinator staff position.

As outlined in the FCT Management Recommendations, the inter-agency FCT Coordinator will be responsible for the development and implementation of the FCT Strategy and funding plan, grant writing, education and outreach, and coordination with trail user groups and volunteers.

Status: As noted above, all three agencies have committed \$10,000 for a total of \$30,000 for the first year of the position. City and County funds will be available on July 1st, the beginning of the 2010 fiscal year. Forest Service funds have already been set aside for the position. In the first year, the work effort of the FCT Coordinator will include development of the FCT Strategy and multi-year work plan, as well as support for agency efforts to coordinate with volunteer trails organizations.

Next Steps: The three agencies will begin recruitment of the FCT Coordinator in July once the CCA has been authorized by all three agencies.

5. Foster development of an umbrella non-profit community organization to assist with trail maintenance, education, fundraising, and community support. Confirm/Maintain multi-agency/non-profit partner agreements.

Fostering the development of an umbrella organization could benefit the three agencies since they cannot solely manage the trails. Non-profits and volunteer organizations will continue to be key to the success of the FCT trails. An umbrella organization could foster collaboration and coordination among them and serve as the primary point of contact. In addition, non-governmental organizations can be very effective in fostering community support for maintaining the trails and adhering to trail use guidelines. Non-profit organizations can seek funding not available to public agencies and may also be better positioned to move projects forward once they are approved.

Status: Since the approval of the FCT Management Recommendations, there has been discussion among agency staff and trails stakeholders about the purpose and function of an umbrella organization. Staff also met with the Santa Barbara County Trails Council (SBTC) to discuss their interest in becoming the umbrella organization. Although ultimately an umbrella organization could serve as the vehicle for long-term management of the trails, its success will be predicated upon clear management guidelines, consensus among the agencies and trails groups, established communication and coordination mechanisms, and strong public agency commitment. Before moving forward, staff believes that additional work is needed to further develop

key elements of the FCT Management Recommendations and establish an ongoing working relationship among the three agencies.

Staff has been meeting with trails stakeholders on a periodic basis to discuss and coordinate trail maintenance projects, training programs and trail condition assessment projects. As a result, a number of projects are underway, and many of them are spearheaded by trails organizations.

Next Steps: Staff will continue to meet periodically with stakeholders to identify and implement projects that are consistent with the FCT Management Recommendations.

Community Outreach and Education

1. Re-implement education efforts, including trail signage, trail hosts, and other sources of information

Education efforts such as signage, informational materials, bike bells, and trail hosts, reduce trail conflict, protect trail resources, and foster understanding of trail management. This recommendation includes short-term objectives such as trailhead signage, outreach through email and web resources, and printed materials. Since there are limited resources, the agencies will also work closely with trail user organizations to develop and implement education efforts.

Status: At the May 2007 meeting, the FCT Task Force approved trailhead signage as a key first step. At the June 2008 meeting, since the trails had little or no information about trail use behavior, staff presented trail etiquette information that would serve as the focus of the signs. The signs were complete in April 2009 with the assistance of graphics designers that volunteered their services. Six of the ten frames were previously constructed with the assistance of the Trails Alliance. Sign installation will occur during the summer and fall 2009.

Next Steps: In response to a number of requests, the next education effort will be to improve agency websites with FCT information. In addition, the agencies will provide outreach support for volunteer projects through email, print newsletters, and press releases. These efforts will support others already underway by SBTC and the Multi-Use Trails Coalition to provide web information about upcoming events.

2. Develop interim voluntary trail use guidelines.

As a preliminary measure, the FCT Management Recommendations suggested interim voluntary trail use guidelines that are promoted through education and outreach efforts. The intent of the guidelines is to achieve greater understanding of appropriate trail behavior and send a consistent message to all trail users through education and outreach efforts. Over the long-term, there may be a need for the three agencies to develop and adopt consistent trail use regulations.

Status: The recently completed trailhead signs provide the first step toward communicating trail use guidelines. Trail stakeholder organizations have also continued to educate their members about appropriate trail use behavior.

Next Steps: The three agencies need to develop additional outreach support through the web, email, print newsletters, and press releases.

3. Build broader community support for the FCT by working with trail user groups to sponsor quarterly events/work days and an annual event to recognize volunteers and collaborative partnerships, among others.

Trail user groups and volunteers will continue to play an important role in the long-term management of the front country trail system. The three agencies could further support their work by assisting with volunteer work days and holding an annual event to recognize volunteer efforts and build broader community support for maintaining the trail system.

Status: Since the beginning of 2009, agency staff has worked with a number of trails organizations to develop trail training workshops and volunteer trail maintenance work days. The SBTC and the three agencies co-sponsored a Forest Service Level 1 trail maintenance training workshop at Stevens Park on March 14th. Santa Barbara Mountain Bike Trail Volunteers and the SBTC sponsored a volunteer trail building workshop on March 28, 2009. Both of these workshops included valuable maintenance of the connector trail in Stevens Park and Jesusita Trail. As noted in the staff report on the impacts of the Jesusita Fire, the trails work day on June 13, 2009 was a huge success with more than 100 volunteers removing hazards on the Jesusita, Tunnel, Rattlesnake and West Fork Cold Spring trails.

Next Steps: Individuals and trails group representatives that completed the training on March 14th are developing additional volunteer trail workdays. Staff will continue to identify opportunities to support trail maintenance projects throughout the year.

Trail Management and Maintenance

1. Conduct an assessment of existing trail conditions and use to evaluate the application and scope of a trail classification system.

Knowledge of existing trail conditions and use are important first steps in developing a trail management and maintenance program. Information gathered regarding trail use and trail conditions will provide the foundation for developing trail guidelines and standards as well as provide the framework for establishing trail use designations. An assessment of existing trail conditions is important for the development of a funding plan and a trails strategy. It is also important to know when and how the trails are used.

Status: At the November 2007 work session, and the subsequent February 2008 meeting, the FCT Task Force supported the use of UTAP – Universal Trail Assessment Process to conduct an assessment of existing trail conditions. In October 2008,

Beneficial Designs conducted a two-day training program in Santa Barbara. The training program was organized by a representative of the Sierra Club and attended by City and County staff, as well as number of representatives from other trails organizations, including the Montecito Trails Foundation, SBTC, Santa Barbara MTV, and MTC.

Next Steps: Once training program participants complete their certification, data collection will begin. Since the process is time consuming, staff proposes to complete the data collection on one trail as a pilot project.

2. Develop a trail classification system and trail standards that are appropriate to Santa Barbara's front country

The topography, soils, and climate of the Santa Barbara front country make its trail system unique. With the exception of fire roads and dirt roads, most front country trails are fairly narrow and steep. As a result, the development of a trail classification system, and trail standards beyond those established by the Forest Service may be difficult. However, since the front country trails are currently multi-use by default, it is recommended that a trail rating system be explored. A classification system would address trail width and grade, side slope, and line of sight. This information along with increased trail management and maintenance would help trail users select an appropriate trail and foster trails that are safely accessible to multiple users.

Status: No work has begun on this recommendation.

Next Steps: Work on this recommendation will begin once the trail conditions and use assessments are complete.

3. Explore developing consistent standards for trails planning, policy, permits, and regulations

Early on, the Task Force identified the need to develop consistent standards among the three agencies for trails planning, policy, permits, and regulations. As the lead agency, Forest Service policies and regulations provide a foundation. Many of the management recommendations would provide a mechanism to achieve consistency, where necessary, as well as determine shortfalls. Specifically, an MOU and the development of a FTC Strategy could form the basis for developing consistent trail use policies and regulations. Key considerations raised by the Task Force include the use of the front country for commercial purposes, trail use guidelines including speed limits, opportunities for generating revenue to support trail maintenance and management, enforcement, methods for addressing trail use conflict, and resource protection, among others.

Status: No work has begun on this recommendation.

Next Steps: Work on this recommendation will occur with the development of the FCT Strategy.

4. Explore a Pilot Program with Trail Use Designations

An evaluation of alternate trail uses and designations would be conducted only after the three agencies have up-to-date information on existing trail conditions and trail users. Baseline data will be critical for an assessment of various trail use options. It is anticipated that consideration of specific trail use designations would also involve extensive public input.

Status: No work has begun on this recommendation.

Next Steps: Work on this recommendation will begin once the trail conditions and use assessments are complete.

ATTACHMENT: Front Country Trails Recommendations Implementation Matrix

SUBMITTED BY: Jill E. Zachary, Assistant Parks and Recreation Director, City of Santa Barbara